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The Kids are Alt-Right: A Review of Authoritarian Attitudes in Young Adults

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

The Kids are Alt-Right: A Review of Authoritarian Attitudes in Young Adults

by

R. P. McDonald

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Section I – Introduction

1.1 – “Very Fine People”

In August of 2017, the streets of central Virginia were swiftly occupied by a caravan of white nationalists, marching in unison while echoing a series of racist and antisemitic chants that fell in tandem with the organizational efforts of the “Unite the Right” rally (Bell, 2019, 306). These protests were primarily orchestrated by prolific American white nationalists and figures of the alt-right to oppose the recent decision made by the city of Charlottesville to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee located in Emancipation Park (Bell, 2019, 310). In the wake of these events, a state of emergency was declared by Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe as white nationalist attendants clashed with law enforcement officials, and counter protestors (Segarra, 2017, n.p). The outcome of these rallies led to scores of injuries, and the death of Heather Heyer who was fatally struck by the vehicle of James Alex Field, after his decision to drive into a group of counter-protesters at the rally (Bell, 2019, 310). These two days were marked by substantial levels of violence, and civil unrest (Gray, 2017, n.p).

During this time, statements made by Donald Trump were met with scorn on behalf of members of the public, legislators, and the media when the sitting President described a number of the white nationalists who chose to attend the Charlottesville rallies as “very fine people”, while coming to their defence in exclaiming that members of press had not treated these far-right extremist groups fairly in the court of public opinion (Gray, 2017, n.p). Following these racially-charged statements from the President that coincided with a latent display of right-wing extremism in Charlottesville, it should come as no surprise that publications during this period, boasting titles such as “The Faces of White Supremacy” and “Trump’s Figurehead Presidency is Driving a New

Kind of Authoritarianism”, would assert the claim that expressions of white supremacy and authoritarianism had reached their apex for the first time in decades in America (Heer, 2017, n.p.).

The contents of many published articles from this time period were correct in highlighting the blatant display of racist and authoritarian attitudes from members of the public, however, they could not have been more incorrect in describing the cultural revival of these dispositions following the election of President Donald Trump. To put things plainly, these attitudes have existed for several decades and simply required a catalyst for them to manifest as significantly as they were demonstrated in 2017. Domestic terror attacks that coincide with right-wing extremism have grown steadily in America since the 1970s and have led to the highest number of fatalities in comparison to all other forms of terrorist attacks (Piazza, 2017, 52). These ideologically driven acts of extremism are far from an anomaly, even when the scope is expanded across borders and into the reaches of developed western democracies in Europe, where the rise of right-wing extremist acts have overlapped considerably with political extremists who espouse authoritarian attitudes and opinions (Ravndal, 2018, 847).

Though the existence of right-wing extremist groups are far from uncommon, one particular point of interest that lies in more recent manifestations of authoritarian displays can be traced to a growing proportion of young white men who have attached themselves to various chapters of organizations that consist of the collective mosaic of the alt-right (DeCook, 2018, 486). The aim of this literature review will attempt to identify and establish a series of research avenues from the existing publications related to the study of authoritarianism that could be used to prepare the reader and researchers to identify the causal pathways that have led to the resurgence of latent racist attitudes among young white men in recent years. The first section of this paper will explore the historical origins of the study of authoritarian personality types through the work of Adorno,

while paying close attention to the development of authoritarian attitudes rooted in early childhood experiences. The second section of this review will examine the evolution of the study of authoritarian personality types, and the newly established measures of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation crafted by Altemeyer, along with Sidanius and Pratto. This section will closely examine recent discoveries that have connected the central tenets of RWA and SDO to racial prejudice and anti-egalitarian attitudes, and how a combination of these measures can be reliably operationalized for the purposes of identifying authoritarian attitudes among young men today. The third portion of this review will explore the role of racialization in American policy decision-making, and the overlap between racist attitudes, RWA and SDO through the works of Huddy and Feldman, Tesler, and Hetherington and Weiler.

The following section will discuss how the growth of ideological shifts on the basis of racial issues in America during the Obama era coincided heavily with Kimmel's conception of "aggrieved entitlement" among young white men, and how these attitudes are enhanced by perceived status threat towards ethnic minorities. We will highlight how this sense of aggrieved entitlement can be attached to isolation at the individual level with reference to the work of Arendt, Kircht and Dillehay. This section will also explore recent psychological approaches that measure the genetic heritability of RWA and SDO from parents to children, and how they are predictive of racial prejudice among young men. The next section of this review will consider how the rise of social media and web 2.0 have provided a greater platform for the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and right-wing extremist content in recent years, and more specifically how groups of young white males who are socially withdrawn, and predisposed to RWA and SDO, are among the most likely to be influenced by this shift. The final section of this paper will propose potential avenues for social scientists to explore how perceived status threat towards ethnic outgroups and

the consumption of extreme online political content may lead to an increase in alt-right attitudes among young white male respondents. We will conclude this literature review by proposing a research design to demonstrate how the antecedent factors of RWA and SDO have a direct effect on explicit racist attitudes, but how an exposure to politically extreme online content will lead to an increased indirect effect on this relationship. We will also identify additional gaps that this proposed study does not address, and will highlight how they can be addressed with future research.

Section II – The Authoritarian Personality Defined

2.1 – Early Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Authoritarianism

Though the study of political behaviour is vast, the prerogative of this section aims to come to a better understanding of what it means to exhibit authoritarian attitudes and behaviour. The primary reason why defining the concept of authoritarianism is important for this study is the necessity of identifying measures that can predict and account for the display of prejudicial attitudes that have become more prevalent among certain groups of young white men in recent years (DeCook, 2018; Kimmel, 2013). Once we come to a greater understanding of how to define and operationalize authoritarianism, this review will be sufficiently equipped to incorporate its use in a research design for explaining how explicit racist attitudes may be predicted by the associated measures of authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981; Valentino et al., 2018). We will discuss how the measures associated with authoritarian attitudes can be operationalized in the following sections.

Though several years had passed since the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Japan as the outcomes of the second world war drew to a close, the spectre of Auschwitz, Dachau, and the thousands of other concentration camps designed to accelerate acts of genocide towards Jews, state

dissidents, and prisoners of war continued to loom in post-war nations (Meseth, 2012, 16). During this period, a number of European academics sought to revitalize the activities of the Frankfurt School, an organization of critical theorists who used the theory of deconstructivism to address political affairs pertaining to capitalism, socialism, and fascism, after its dispersion in Europe that coincided with the rise of the Third Reich in 1933 (Meseth, 2016, 20). In an effort to account for the atrocities committed over the course of the Holocaust, and the cultural miasma affecting the German population in the post-war period, German philosopher and critical theorist Theodor Adorno would be among the first thinkers to attempt to historically contextualize and explain why the Holocaust and the rise of fascism had occurred (Ostrove, 2013, 299). More importantly, Adorno sought to create a psychological framework to determine how fascistic tendencies could be rationalized by the public at both the individual and collective level (Marasco, 2018, 792). These questions would later pave the way for *The Authoritarian Personality (1950)*, which is among the most recognized and polarizing publications related to the study of Authoritarianism.

The basis of the 990-page monolith published by Adorno et al. may seem impenetrable at a first glance, but much of this work can be simplified by highlighting the primary theoretical elements of how the authors attempt to define an authoritarian personality in its natal stages. Moving in tandem with a number of prevailing constructivist theories that dominated the Frankfurt School, the authors posit that authoritarian personality types could be best understood by a combination of attitudes maintained by individuals, and group-based societal customs that have a tendency to develop alongside a political and psychological pathology (Smith, 1997, 160). The authors would provide the reader with insights on how a number of social scientists at the time had observed linkages between enhanced prejudicial social attitudes through economic conditions and

perceived group membership, but highlight how analyses of individual-level personality structures were scarce (Adorno et al. 1950, 10).

Though the authors highlight that the various rational choice models used to describe the self-interested actions on behalf of different social groups maintained some degree of predictability, certain attitudes held by those with damaged or weakened egos were often irrational in nature (Adorno et al. 1950, 11). Those who chose to democratically elect the National Socialist party were not solely products of their environment in a Germany saddled with poverty following the outcomes during the First World War and the Great Depression. The rise of fascism during this period could be best characterized as the interplay between social customs, economic conditions, and unresolved tensions of the psyche when established social orders, such as the Weimar Republic, began to dissolve (Marasco, 2018, 793). For these reasons, it should come as no surprise that the theoretical basis of *The Authoritarian Personality* would be steeped in a psychoanalytic framework as popularized by Freud (Feldman, 2015, 197).

Despite the initial goal of identifying a collection of causes that would be used to explain the rise of antisemitism in Europe, the findings of Adorno et al. would point towards the linkage of a more sweeping manifestation of ethnocentrism (Feldman, 2015, 197). Rather than maintaining a single attitude that is predictive of the likes of antisemitism, the authors postulate that a collection of antipathetic social attitudes would contribute to a more comprehensive description of authoritarian personality types, which would include opinions on racial prejudice, homophobia, and a fear of others on a broader scale (Adorno et al., 1950, 44). From the perspective of Adorno et al., there existed a significant overlap between this set of anti-social tendencies and specific political attitudes that were shaped on the basis of the ideological framework of ethnocentrism (Adorno et al., 1950, 104). The authors maintain that ascribing to this ideological framework

would involve perceptions of one's own ethnicity or social class as "in-groups", and others that fall outside of this scope as "outgroups" (Adorno et al., 1950, 104). Aside from a tribalistic outlook on different social and ethnic groups that respondents were not members of, authoritarians would also boast personality traits such as experiencing difficulty in emotional regulation, an inability to deal with ambiguity, and aggression (Adorno et al., 1950, 233).

According to Adorno et al., the prognosis of these internal personality traits can be traced to the early childhood experiences of those who are predisposed to becoming authoritarians later in life. (Adorno et al., 1950, 315). For the authors, the familial dynamic between the formative years of a child, and the way by which the central values and attitudes of the parents are transmitted and enforced will contribute to a formation of the child's superego (Adorno et al. 1950, 316). In the case where harsher disciplinary methods are used by the parents to enforce a rigid adherence to traditional social conventions, the child would be likely to internalize a series of unresolved conflicts with the mother or father figures from these early stages in their lives (Adorno et al. 1950, 317). As a result, those possessing an underdeveloped or over-punitive superego as a function of resentment towards the parents, but more specifically a repressed desire to submit to figures of authority, will exude its influence on the personal relationships of an individual, and more importantly towards their outlook on public and political affairs as private citizens (Adorno et al., 1950, 317). The authors would highlight that the combination of a willingness to submit to traditional social conventions, hostility directed towards those who do not match an individual's perceived "ingroup" along social and ethnic lines would also reflect antidemocratic attitudes on the basis of different questionnaire responses (Adorno et al., 1950, 223). Together, these persistent behavioural patterns would form the first psychological basis of an authoritarian personality.

In order to qualify the theoretical statements brought forward in the earlier components of the volume, Adorno et al. would craft a comprehensive questionnaire designed to measure a variety of distinct, yet related personality components that would represent the sum of the parts of an authoritarian personality. (Adorno et al., 1950, 225). Since the origins of authoritarian personality types had been described as multi-faceted by the authors, this set of 77 questions famously referred to as the F-Scale (F for fascist) would be used to measure a combination of traits that were indicative of the overarching conception of authoritarian personality types (Adorno et al., 1950, 228). This set of personality traits would be described as follows:

- A. *Conventionalism* – A rigid adherence to traditional/conventional values.
- B. *Authoritarian Submission* – Submissive and uncritical attitudes towards moral authorities of the ingroup.
- C. *Authoritarian Aggression* – The tendency to seek, condemn, reject, and punish those who do not adhere to traditional/conventional values.
- D. *Anti-intraception* – An opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, or the tender-minded.
- E. *Superstition and Stereotypy* – The belief in mystical determinants of one's fate, and the disposition to think in rigid categories.
- F. *Power and "Toughness"* – A preoccupation of being absorbed by the dynamics of the dominance/submission, strength/weakness, leader/follower dimension. A strong identification with power-figures, and an exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.
- G. *Destructiveness and Cynicism* – Generalized hostility, and the vilification of other humans.

H. *Projectivity* – A disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things occur in the world, and the outward projection of unconscious emotional impulses.

I. *Sex* – An exaggerated concern with sexual phenomena.

Given the emphasis that had been placed on viewing authoritarianism as a multidimensional personality structure, each of the nine traits included in the F-scale were seen by the authors as holding equal levels of importance in efforts of measuring those disposed to antidemocratic and fascistic attitudes (Adorno et al, 1950, 228). Despite representing the first major psychological inquiry that was devoted to the study of authoritarian personality types, *The Authoritarian Personality* would be met with a slew of criticism almost immediately following its initial publication, which would point towards a series of major conceptual and methodological inconsistencies (Gordon, 2017, 36).

2.2 – Criticism of the F-Scale and the Impact of *The Authoritarian Personality*

Despite an effort to marry the sociological and historical elements that coincided with the rise of authoritarianism in the twentieth century along with the psychoanalytic theories presented by Adorno et al, many critics would point towards an overreliance directed toward the subjective experiences of respondents (Gordon, 2017, 37). Instead of attempting to establish generalizable theories and measurements that would make use of socio-historical events, and broader psychological processes to describe how authoritarianism may occur in individuals, Adorno et al. would rely too heavily on the psychoanalytic approaches that were not compatible with the F-scale and other measures used for the study (Gordon, 2017, 37).

To begin, many critics saw the work of Adorno et al. to be ideologically biased from the outset. Though *The Authoritarian Personality* was initially conceived as a study to identify the major increase in antisemitism among fascist organizations during the first half of the twentieth

century, a number of scholars were quick to highlight how the use of conventionalism as a descriptive trait led to a manifestation of authoritarianism that would be exclusive to those along the conservative domain of the political spectrum (Gordon, 2017, 38). In doing so, this particular classification of authoritarianism could steer the potential of exploring the concept of left-wing authoritarianism away from academic discourse. Given the rise of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union that housed the architects of the Soviet prison systems that led to the persecution of ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and dissidents of the CPSU, it should come as no surprise that left-wing authoritarians would be likely to share an assortment of similar anti-democratic attitudes as those on the right. Despite these valid criticisms directed towards the scope of the authors' research, a number of scholars have highlighted the lack of evidence that could be used to substantiate the similarities between left-wing authoritarians and right-wing authoritarians (Stone, 1980, Federico et al., 2017). Even in recent times, there is ample evidence to suggest that an overwhelming amount of politically motivated violence can be associated with right-wing extremism as opposed to left-wing extremism (Piazza, 2017; ADL, 2020).

Perhaps the most damning criticisms levied against *The Authoritarian Personality* was directed towards a number of issues related to the methodology of the project. One of the first complications related to the use of the F-scale can be traced to the response sets that were generated to measure the previously mentioned traits used to describe this scale of measurement. Each question included in this scale was constructed in a way where all "agree" responses would positively align with authoritarian attitudes, meaning that respondents with agreement response bias would generate higher scores in authoritarianism regardless of any major differences in personality from other respondents (Feldman, 2015, 197). Outside of these issues, the measured outcomes that coincide with the nine separate traits included in the F-scale boasted weak

relationships, which were too difficult to interpret and draw generalizable conclusions to support the theoretical hypotheses crafted by the authors (Altemeyer, 1981, 143).

These strong critiques against the work of Adorno et al. begs the question as to whether or not the central arguments of *The Authoritarian Personality* would even be relevant to use in the greater scope of the study of social psychology (Rokeach, 1956, 4). Though the measures used to define and explain authoritarianism were lacking in both internal and external validity, there would be no reason to throw many of the ideas circulated from this work out with the bathwater. Despite the fact that Freudian theory has waned significantly in the field of social psychology in recent years, many of the points raised by Adorno et al. have seen significant levels of refinement in studies that are more specific to the issues of racial prejudice, the transfer of political attitudes from parents to children, and right-wing authoritarianism in isolation (Tesler, 2013, Federico et al, 2017, Altemeyer, 1991). Despite the many flaws that coincide with the theoretical and methodological findings from *The Authoritarian Personality*, the magnitude of the contributions made by Adorno et al. to authoritarianism as a study continue to maintain a presence in the years following its publication (Kircht & Dillehay, 1967; Altemeyer, 1981). These contributions have rendered the study to be more comprehensive, and precise to the field of social psychology (Kirchst & Dillehay, 1967, 27).

For the purposes of this literature review, the work of Adorno et al. provides the reader with a foundation that is required to understand what authoritarianism represents on a conceptual basis (1950, 225). Though the measures used in *The Authoritarian Personality* do not translate as effectively in the contemporary context, the application of the concepts that relate to developing authoritarian attitudes during the formative years of childhood can be applied through a theoretical lens that speaks to the prevalence of prejudicial attitudes among groups of young white men in

recent years (DeCook, 2018, 487). Individuals who have actively participated in extremist rallies or engage in politically charged acts of terror have been largely motivated by racial prejudice, or express contempt towards the existing social order (Kimmel, 2017, 70). These motivating factors can be understood through Adorno et al.'s characterization of conventionalism and authoritarian aggression (1950, 228). Though these connections are easily identifiable, how do they speak to the development of authoritarian tendencies as a result of a child's formative years, and how can they be operationalized to assess authoritarian attitudes in young white men today? We will address these questions in the following section.

Section III – Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and other Contemporary Approaches

3.1 – Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)

In order to explore how contemporary measures of authoritarianism can be reliably operationalized to assess these attitudes in young adults, it is important for us to briefly consider how authoritarian and racist attitudes are fostered in younger groups of individuals (Kimmel, 2013, Adorno et al, 1950, Altemeyer, 1996). As previously disclosed, violent acts of right-wing extremism have been on the rise over the course of the last few decades in developed Western democracies (Piazza, 2017; Kimmel, 2013, Tomkinson et al, 2020). We will first consider how these attitudes have been operationalized in the years following the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality*. In doing so, we will come to a greater understanding of how these measures can be used to identify a connection between authoritarian tendencies and explicit racist attitudes.

As the domineering presence of psychoanalysis began to wane in the decades that followed the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality*, a number of social scientists began to consider how the external aspects of early socialization could lead to the development of authoritarian attitudes in place of the Freudian descriptions of childhood trauma (Rokeach, 1961, 252). Rather than approaching authoritarianism in a fashion that would account for a staggering number of personality traits as included in the F-scale, many writers would attempt to narrow the scope of their research by analyzing a smaller set of attitudes designed to generate more reliable forms of measurement (Altemeyer, 1981, 25-26). One of the chief contributors to this movement would be Canadian psychologist Bob Altemeyer, who sought to reclassify these attitudes as measures for what would later be characterized as Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA).

From the outset, RWA would be described as a combination of social and political attitudes that would be split into three different categories (Altemeyer, 1981, 147). The first of these attitudes was described as “Authoritarian Submission”, which would be described as a willingness to submit to the perceived established figures of authority in the society an individual resides in (Altemeyer, 1981, 148). The second attitude, “Authoritarian Aggression” would be recognized as a tendency to maintain hostile attitudes towards outgroups, or towards those who are perceived to threaten the legitimacy of the previously mentioned figures of authority (Altemeyer, 1981, 148). According to Altemeyer, these hostile dispositions and behaviours would tend to overlap with a desire for authoritarians to seek the approval of those included in positions of authority by the virtue of their actions and opinions (Altemeyer, 1981, 148). The final component of RWA would be described as “Conventionalism”, or a strong amount of support directed towards traditional social conventions that may have been established by social groups, religious groups, or authority figures that assume leadership roles in a society (Altemeyer, 1981, 148).

The development of the central attitudes of RWA would be heavily anchored under a theoretical basis of early socialization, and external learning during the formative years of an individual (Altemeyer, 1996, 77). More importantly, Altemeyer would posit that these early experiences could also yield a degree of predictability related to the attitude formation of individuals during their later years in life (1996, 77). In his later work, Altemeyer would provide the reader with his “Tale of Two Citizens” in order to describe how different styles of parenting during a child’s formative years, and over the course of their adolescence could be used to predict the growth of the central attitudes that coincide with RWA (Altemeyer, 1996, 80). Through this example, the author described how if a child were to be raised in a setting where adherence to traditional social conventions, obedience to figures of authority, and a hostile outlook towards different groups was fostered, that individual would be more likely to develop the previously mentioned attitudes that coincide with RWA (Altemeyer, 1996, 80). On the other hand, children who were raised in settings that encouraged independence and creativity, while maintaining degrees of tolerance towards groups and individuals that did not conform to pre-established social norms and customs would be far less likely to adopt the attitudes that match the description of RWA (Altemeyer, 1996, 81).

More importantly, the work completed by Altemeyer would boast stronger levels of statistical reliability when compared to the F-scale (Altemeyer, 1981, 173). This in part, would be a result of Altemeyer’s efforts in identifying traits included in the F-Scale that maintained the greatest levels of statistical reliability, and inter-item correlations that could be repurposed to match the three attitudinal descriptions of RWA (Altemeyer, 1981, 158-160). After years of modifying a number of questionnaires drawn from the F-scale and the Lee and Warr scale, Altemeyer was able to successfully generate a scale that was conceptually loyal to the earlier works

of Adorno et al, while maintaining a set of stronger psychometric properties that would outperform most, if not all of its predecessors (Altemeyer, 1981, 174).

Despite the fact that measurements for RWA have been in circulation for several decades, they have shown no signs of losing their levels of reliability during this period. If anything, the applicability of RWA has seen a greater breadth of coverage in recent years, where the measures included in its fold have been used to generate statistically significant connections to other attitudes such as prejudice (Ekehammar et al, 2004), ethnocentrism (Radkiewicz, 2016), and social intolerance (Berggren et al, 2019). It would, however, be a naïve assumption to only use RWA as the sole measure for determining an individual's level of intolerance or ethnic prejudice. Authors such as Duckitt would be correct in pointing out how the study of authoritarianism and RWA tend to emphasize intragroup relationships between individuals and perceived figures of authority, which does not necessarily highlight intergroup relations on a broader scale (Duckitt, 1989, 67).

In order to assess authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice, it is paramount that researchers are able to use measures that can capture an individual's perceptions of groups as well as established figures of authority (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981). More importantly, researchers need to understand how authoritarians perceive individuals hailing from various social and ethnic backgrounds outside of the groups they identify with (Duckitt, 1989; Pratto et al., 1994). For researchers to identify the linkages between authoritarian attitudes and the rise of explicit racist attitudes among young white men in the contemporary context, it is important that the measures used to assess authoritarian attitudes are sufficiently robust to capture the many manifestations of prejudice that exist in the present day (Huddy & Feldman, 2009; Tesler 2012). The following section will highlight how additional measures captured under the scope of Social Dominance

Orientation (SDO) can be used to predict prejudicial attitudes that fall outside of the previously disclosed purview of RWA (Duckitt, 1989; Pratto et al., 1994).

3.2 – Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)

Issues pertaining to intergroup dynamics and authoritarianism were addressed with the work of Sidanius, Devreux, and Pratto, that would be explored under the label of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). Prior to receiving its contemporary namesake and boasting psychometric properties for researchers to use, SDO was initially one factor postulated alongside a slew of other factors that contributed to the introduction of Social Dominance Theory by social psychologists Jim Sidanius, Erik Devreux, and Felicia Pratto (1992, 379). According to these researchers, SD theory would account for a specific worldview that views elaborate social systems as rigid and unwavering, where endogamous social groups have the capacity to navigate through a social hierarchy that may be enhanced or limited based on the status of the groups that individuals belong to respectively (Sidanius, Devreux, & Pratto, 1992, 379). For those who are inclined to ascribe to the tenets that explain the basis of SD theory, two separate social castes exist; One consisting of a dominant hegemonic social group that are the chief beneficiaries of the entire social hierarchy, and a negatively perceived group (or groups) that account for the bottom of this perceived social hierarchy (Sidanius, Devreux & Pratto, 1992, 379).

The persistence of intergroup dominance and social disparity are seen as maintaining themselves on the basis of three distinct factors by those who subscribe to SD theory. (Sidanius, Devreux & Pratto, 1992, 379) The first can be characterized as “aggregated institutional discrimination”, or the allocation of social value and esteem from institutions such as the judicial system, school, or private corporations (ibid, 1992, 379). The second factor, “aggregated individual discrimination”, is defined as an amassment of discrimination of one member of the

dominant social group on behalf of those among the lower social stratum (1992, 379). The final factor, “behavioural asymmetry”, implies that the behaviour of individuals that belong to different groups along the aforementioned social hierarchy will demonstrate significant intergroup differences when compared to the dominant social group that will reinforce and perpetuate the various disparities that occur in the hierarchy-based system (1992, 379). According to the authors, an inclination to endorse these factors, especially through the context of behavioural asymmetry are a product of early socialization patterns that are conducive to stereotyping, and ultimately anti-egalitarian attitudes (1992, 380).

Moving from these initial postulations, the authors highlight a series of additional factors that are used to predict an ascription to the three central tenets of SD theory (1992, 380). Among these factors include the “social comparison and social identity processes”, which are defined as the formation of social identities and the subsequent comparison of ingroups and outgroups in order to acquire favourable outcomes for the group an individual maintains their respective membership (1992, 380). The second factor is described as “self-esteem maintenance”, or the desire for an individual to discriminate against outgroups on the basis of enhancing their respective self-esteem (1992, 380). The third process, of which the is the primary focus of this section draws from, can be characterized as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). At the core, SDO implies a sentiment to perceive an individual’s ingroup as greater than other groups along the perceived social hierarchy, while endorsing the idea that one’s group also possesses higher levels of social status and esteem than other groups (1992, 380). The authors equate SDO with a general sentiment favourable of anti-egalitarianism, which would demonstrate support for discrimination against outgroups, and support for the fourth factor held under the scope of SD theory, known as legitimizing myths (1992, 380). Legitimizing myths, and support for these phenomena are

described by Sidanius et al. as a selection of accepted attitudes, values, and opinions that establish moral legitimacy to the existing disparities in social value (1992, 381). Examples of legitimizing myths would include the concept of meritocracy, along with anti-black racism in the United States (1992, 381).

The reason why SDO was considered to be among the most important component of SD theory lies entirely in its capacity to be operationalized as a measure for predicting a variety of political and social attitudes (Pratto et al., 1994, 741). Since the central tenets of an individual to score high in SDO would imply a desire for ingroup dominance and reaching levels of superiority over perceived outgroups, the authors would identify a number of attitudes and policy positions that predict the magnitude respondents might score in SDO (Pratto et al., 1994, 742). Among the fourteen items in these attitudinal-policy measures would include ethnic prejudice, sexism, an opposition to social welfare and civil rights programs, hawkish opinions on military policies, and cultural elitism (ibid, 1994, 742-743). The results of these measures for SDO would boast high levels of internal and external reliability, even after two separate samples had been tested across three-month intervals (1994, 747). Following the initial experiments conducted by Pratto et al., the measurements for higher scores in SDO proved to serve as a strong candidate for consistently assessing respondents' beliefs in legitimizing myths, their corresponding levels of sexism, cultural elitism, an opposition to social programs, and racial policies (1994, 754).

Following its conceptualization and initial operationalization several decades ago, SDO has continued to maintain a dominant presence in assessing similar measures as described by Sidanius and Pratto (1992, 1994), while narrowing the previously mentioned focuses of SDO towards issues that are more domain specific. Examples of this would include positive relationships between SDO and newly established measures for Hostile Sexism (HS) in male

respondents (Sibley et al., 2007, 163), and more specifically has been proven to serve as a moderating variable between the relationship the ascribed importance towards the racial identity of white respondents, and a likelihood of endorsing right-wing extremism (Bai, 2020, 402). While these studies may appear to have developed separately from Altemeyer's seminal works related to RWA, there is much to be said about how both RWA and SDO are both distinct, yet central to the discovery of authoritarian attitudes in the contemporary context. Before researchers attempt to construct a research study to identify the rise of racial prejudice through authoritarian attitudes among young white men, we need to understand if the measures for RWA and SDO can be reliably applied to the general population. In the following subsection doing so, we will see how a combination of RWA and SDO are practical in the greater context of identifying authoritarian attitudes that are predictive of racial prejudice (Sibley et al., 2007; Roets et al., 2006).

3.3 – Distinct yet Still Related: Identifying Connections Between RWA and SDO

At a glance, it should come as no surprise that RWA and SDO differ slightly on the basis of their respective conceptualizations. As previously highlighted, the attitudes that coincide with RWA tend to emphasize a rigid adherence to traditional social conventions for measures of protection against a perceived social threat or outgroup (Duckitt, 2009, 101). The central tenets of SD theory that gave rise to SDO can be best described as a set of ideological attitudes that demonstrate one's preferences towards group-based dominance in a perceived hierarchical setting. (Duckitt, 2009, 99). Besides from these distinct conceptual properties, the scales that are operationalized for both respective concepts tend to differ. For RWA, the measurement scales had been generated for the purposes of gauging an individual's support for social cohesiveness, figures of authority, and the levels of hostility they maintain towards groups that they believe to threaten these rigid social fabrics (Altemeyer, 1981, 147-48). In the case of SDO, the measurement scales

were used to determine the levels of support directed towards the existence of social and economic disparities, and more importantly for the belief that perceived ingroups should exert control and dominance over outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994, 745).

To put things plainly, the primary difference between both the conceptualization and operationalization of RWA and SDO can be characterized as a desire for extreme social conformity versus group-based dominance. If we were to consider the greater context of assessing authoritarian attitudes in the present day, there is growing evidence that supporters of extreme right-wing groups exhibit tendencies that align with the scales associated with both RWA and SDO (Altemeyer, 1981; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; DeCook, 2018). Individuals who have expressed unwavering support for anti-immigration policies and the racist appeals of Donald Trump, while encouraging acts of violence against those who are perceived to threaten America's social fabric, meet Altemeyer's characterizations of authoritarian submission, aggression, and conventionalism (Altemeyer, 1981; DeCook, 2018). Moreover, the growing number of young white men who believe that their perceived dominant status in society has faltered as a result of immigration, affirmative action programs, and a decrease in gender disparity in recent years are also preoccupied with group-based dominance, a primary characterization of SDO (Kimmel, 2013; Pratto et al., 1994). It is clear that the scales associated with RWA and SDO bear an increasing relevance to the increase in authoritarian and prejudicial attitudes among young white men in the present day (Kimmel 2013; DeCook, 2018). This is why identifying the empirical connections between these two scales is integral to any research studies that may be designed to assess the rise in alt-right attitudes in recent years.

Despite the fact that RWA and SDO were crafted independently of one another, and boasted a series of different theoretical objectives, many researchers would be quick to identify

how these measures were in many ways connected (Wilson & Sibley, 2013, 278). One of the primary factors where these separate entities tend to overlap can be associated with the concept of generalized prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley 2007, 116). Using what was defined as the Dual-Process Model (DPM), Duckitt and friends would create three separate factors revolving around prejudice and its similar and differential implications on both RWA and SDO (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007, 117). For RWA, prejudice would manifest from a perceived threat as a result of the existence of groups that fall outside of the scope of an existing set of social norms and customs (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007, 116). In the case of SDO, prejudice would tend to be directed towards groups who are considered inferior than the dominant group that an individual belongs to (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007, 116). More importantly, the third measure that would be defined as generalized prejudice would include negative opinions towards outgroups that are seen as a threat to the existing social fabric, while also activating feelings of competitiveness over the power and social status of a particular group (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007, 116). Not only did these initial tests boast statistical reliability from the outset, but would also see their results replicated through different mediums following its initial publication (Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009, Asbrock et al., 2010).

Despite their representation of two distinct worldviews, it has become increasingly apparent that a combination of RWA and SDO can be operationalized in a fashion that could predict the many manifestations of prejudice in contemporary society. Findings that imply the considerable overlap between measures of RWA and SDO are important to this literature review, primarily because of their greater application that relates to the rise of alt-right movements among young men (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994; Kimmel, 2013). Our research question aims to identify a number of causal pathways to better understand the connection between authoritarian attitudes and an increase in racist behaviour among young white men in recent years. In order to

propose any research study that grapples with these linkages, we need to highlight which measures in recent years have been best suited to identify authoritarian tendencies. Based on the research and literature that has been published, we posit that the best possible measures to proceed with a study on authoritarian attitudes are a combination of both RWA and SDO (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994; Roets et al., 2006).

Moving from this position, the combination of RWA and SDO in the domain of measuring a wide range of attitudes that fall under the continuum of prejudice has been a common occurrence, even in recent years (Dunwoody & McFarland, 2018; Sibley et al., 2007; Roets et al., 2006). This in part can be traced to the statistical reliability of both attitudinal measures, but more importantly, due to the wider scope of attitudes that these measures have the capacity of capturing when placing the many aspects of prejudice under their grasp. Together, measures for RWA and SDO have successfully predicted enhanced levels of prejudice towards religious minorities (Dunwoody & McFarland, 2018), sexist attitudes, (Sibley et al. 2007), and most saliently, racist attitudes (Roets et al., 2006). Though each of these forms of prejudice have maintained a significant presence in the domain of academic discussions, no other forms of prejudice have been propelled into the scope of both academia and public discourse in recent years as significantly as the concept of race, and more particularly, how racism has continued to persist through the social policy dimension in American politics.

Section IV – Racism and Racial Polarization in America

4.1 – The “Resurgence” of Racism in America

This section will begin by dispelling a great deal of fiction that had been thrown into the public eye on behalf of members of the media, and even some scholars. This series of egregious

errors had been briefly mentioned in our introduction but serves as one of the more significant cornerstones in the contemporary analysis of studying authoritarianism, and the attitudes coinciding with authoritarian dispositions that have been analyzed in previous sections. In recent years, a high proportion of western democracies have been subject to the rapid expansion and successful enfranchisement of far-right populist political parties (Muiz & Immerzeel, 2017, 919). Examples of which would include the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the National Front in France, and the United Kingdom Independence Party, who played a critical role in the success in the BREXIT referendum, which officially marked the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2016 (Muiz & Immerzeel, 2017, 921). Though the popularization of these political organizations in Europe would see substantial levels of coverage through the media and in various circles of the social sciences, no other movement would compare to the levels of press coverage that the election and tenure of Donald Trump received over his time in office as President of the United States. (Roberto, 2017, 26).

This incendiary period of American Politics would be marked by the proliferation of sexist, xenophobic, and racist outbursts by the sitting President and his administration, while being echoed even more intensely by his voter base (Roberto, 2017, 26). Over the course of his tenure, Trump enacted a number of policies that matched the hostile sentiment of his campaign rhetoric directed towards ethnic and religious outgroups (Gitlin, 2020, 69). Building the wall across the American Mexican border to prevent “bad ombres” from entering the country illegally, and enacting a travel ban over the regions of Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States would certainly align with the previously mentioned typology of ingroup-outgroup hostility that the foundations of RWA and SDO attach themselves to (Altemeyer, 1981, Pratto et al, 1994). The major turning point for a number of lawmakers, and members of the media would coincide with the

Charlottesville protests, where the sitting President echoed support and sympathy for the white supremacists that attended these rallies (Gray, 2017, n.p). Commentators would be correct in asserting that this display of racist attitudes saw tacit support from the Trump administration, however, where these individuals would be mistaken is in the conclusion they would draw with respect to how these racist attitudes were revived after the election of President Trump.

The truth of the matter is that racism and racist policy preferences in America began to seep their way into public discourse towards a critical point in the history of American national security, which would primarily occur in the wake of the September 11th attacks (Hetherington & Weiler, 2011, 548). Perhaps one of the later consequences that can be traced to the activation of racist attitudes in recent times can be traced to the election of Donald Trump (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Giroux, 2017). With these considerations aside, the racist attitudes espoused by some elected officials and members of the public did not necessarily crystalize on the basis of introducing support for the types of policies enacted by the Trump administration, which will be discussed in further detail below (Giroux, 2017, 53).

4.2 – Authoritarian Worldviews and Political Polarization in America

Based on the years of social psychological research that have been reviewed in previous sections, it should come as no surprise that authoritarian attitudes and prejudice have maintained a persistent presence in American society (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 64). Prejudicial attitudes can be traced back as far as the legal support and sanctioning of slavery from the thirteen colonies when America declared its independence from Great Britain, which continued to manifest through the Civil War in the nineteenth century, and through Jim Crow Laws in the twentieth century (Smith, 2018, 257). Moreover, authoritarian attitudes in America saw an increase throughout the post-Second World War period as public fears associated with the growth of the Soviet Union and

Communism began to spread (Fensterwald, 1958, 294). These attitudes grew alongside McCarthyism in the public sphere, which can be characterized as a sustained effort of accusing individuals residing in America of acting as subversive operatives of the Soviet Union with no evidence to support one's claims (Fensterwald, 1958, 294).

Though these attitudes saw some decline in the decades that followed the American Civil Rights movement and the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a stark tonal shift in how elected officials and members of the media began to portray themselves and their opponents in the years following the September 11th attacks (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 1). During this period, a large proportion of conservative commentators and political candidates would begin to hurl insults such as “girlie men” towards their electoral competition under the pretense that Democrats were weaker on a variety of policy decisions, while Republicans acted as the “strongmen” that would provide greater protective measures to the public (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 2). By using these descriptions, members of the Republican party were rendered more capable of delivering hawkish stances related to national defense, and the looming spectre of terrorism into the public eye (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 2). According to the authors, actions such as these would mark the beginning of a latent activation of two separate political worldviews that would rise to dominance in American culture in the following years (ibid, 2009, 33).

One of the dominant attributes described by Hetherington and Weiler that coincides with this newly identified division in worldviews is described as authoritarianism (ibid, 2009, 10). This characterization of authoritarianism would not differ substantially from the previous descriptions of RWA and SDO. At its core, the authors posit that authoritarianism can be measured as an inclination to desire social orderliness from the actions of established figures of authority who are believed to be capable of establishing security against groups or individuals who threaten the status

quo (ibid, 2009, 41). This desire for social orderliness would also be accompanied by rigid thinking patterns and an unwillingness to process information that may challenge an individual's core beliefs (ibid, 2009, 41). These views are seen as desirable in authority figures, such as lawmakers and presidential candidates, whereby those who are predisposed to authoritarianism attach significant levels of importance to the messaging these individuals deliver publicly (ibid, 2009, 41). Authoritarian-minded voters are less likely to approach issues along the social and policy domain with a willingness to question the decisions of authoritarian-minded leaders, rendering those with authoritarian tendencies to account for a "black or white" assessment of the social and political arena (ibid, 2009, 44). More importantly, those who fall under the scope of an authoritarian worldview will likely exhibit contempt towards perceived outgroups as a result of threat activation, which became increasingly apparent toward members of the Arab community following the September 11th attacks (ibid, 2009, 4).

The most poignant finding concerned itself with public opinion responses related to the Bush administration's hawkish anti-terrorism decisions related to the decisive partisan turn for questions revolving around a willingness to sacrifice civil liberties, and ignoring the Geneva conventions with respect to the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay between identified Republicans and Democrats (ibid, 2009, 135). From the perspective of the authors, this growing disparity along partisan lines has revolved primarily around a series of core changes in elite discourse in recent decades, which are eventually transmitted as informational cues to identified partisans and the remainder of the mass public (ibid, 2009, 139). More importantly, elite cues would ultimately yield differential partisan stances over the concept of race in American public discourse (ibid, 2009, 139). Although *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* was published only one year after Barack Obama's historic election, many authors would provide even

further support that the American public would rely on informational cues from partisan elites for opinion formation, particularly along the continuum of racial politics (Tesler, 2012; Sebastian Parker, 2016)

4.3 – The Racialization of Public Policy Debates through the Obama Era

Though the election of America’s first Black President served as an historic landmark in challenging the institutionally racist structure that has been entwined with American culture for so many years, Barack Obama’s tenure would not be met without a display of race-based opposition to a number of policies introduced by his administration (Tesler, 2012, 691). More specifically, studies by Tesler would closely consider the impact of racial attitudes on healthcare opinions before and after the election of Barack Obama (2012, 691). Tesler would provide the reader with a theoretical overview of the concept of racialization, which can be characterized as the way racial attitudes tend to influence policy preferences as a result of media coverage that activates racial opposition to certain policies, along with the role that elite issue advocates play in crafting connections between policies and social groups (2012, 691). The combination of these factors can be traced to Tesler’s “spillover of racialization” hypothesis, which highlights Obama’s race, and the race-based public reactions to his presidency as some of the primary factors related to why American public opinion on healthcare has become increasingly polarized (2012, 692).

First, this study would incorporate cross-sectional survey data spanning several decades determining that with exception to 1994, racial resentment had non-significant impacts on respondents’ healthcare placement, which changed significantly in 2009 where support for Obama’s healthcare measures among the least to most racially resentful white respondents dropped by twenty percent (2012, 695). In order to adjust for sampling and mode differences between the

2009 survey and earlier years, Tesler introduced two separate panel studies during periods where Obama was in office that measured how racial resentment among white voters was a strong predictor towards supporting private healthcare, even with measures such as partisanship and political ideology held constant (2012, 695-696). To further separate the possibility that party identification played more of a role towards polarization in healthcare than Obama's race did, the author included a series of experimental conditions that would delegate the responsibility of proposing these healthcare policies to white senators (2012, 699). The changes included in these experimental conditions led to a significant decrease in resentment effects towards healthcare policies when Obama was not mentioned (2012, 699). The final piece of this study highlights the significant differences in support for healthcare proposals between the black and white communities, by comparing a pooled set of survey responses from 1993-94 and 2009-2010 (2012, 701). Divisions in support for the proposed healthcare measures under the Clinton administration in 1993 between white Americans and black Americans would bloat from an initial thirty percent difference to fifty-two percent in 2009 following the introduction of Obamacare (Tesler, 2012, 701).

While it is apparent that public policy preferences have shifted on the basis of race in America, what would these findings in the literature imply about racial attitudes in general? Many authors highlight that while the election of Barack Obama ultimately contributed to a reduction of negative racial stereotyping of whites towards blacks, factors such as racial resentment led to a disproportionate amount of support towards Republican candidates among whites in the 2008 and 2012 elections (Sebastian Parker, 2016, Tesler, 2015). An acceleration of political polarization since Obama's election could also be attached to the popularization of the Tea Party, that has been credited for shifting the Republican Party further to the right as a result of the racially conservative

views espoused by the members and prolific figures of the organization (Sebastian Parker, 2016, 224).

These findings could lead one to believe that while the election of Obama led to significant positive outcomes in the domain of redressing the institutional issues associated with racism, the outcomes of his election have also led to an aggressive activation of racist attitudes among individuals who may have passively held these worldviews in the past. (Tessler, 2015, 109). The onus can also be attributed to the elected officials and political elites who echo these racist attitudes and provide cues to the public that reinforce these outlooks. (Tesler, 2015, 105). Support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election led to extremely low levels of support in the black community for his Presidential bid, and higher levels of support among whites (Sebastian Parker, 2016, 222). These differences in campaign support along racial lines point to opposite outcomes when considering the lower levels of white support for Obama in 2008 and 2012, providing further support for the previously mentioned findings as they relate to racial resentment among whites (Sebastian Parker, 2016, 222). This would highlight yet another important question; If blatant racist attitudes are in decline among respondents, how can academics accurately and reliably measure attitudes that can be tied to factors such as racial resentment? Moreover, how can these measurements be traced to the concept of authoritarianism, and authoritarianism among young white men? Questions such as these will be addressed in the following subsection.

4.4 – The Evolution of Racist Attitudes in Recent Years

As disclosed in previous passages of this section, the election of Obama would see a general decline in survey responses that could be attached to racial stereotyping, and other explicitly racist attitudes (Sebastian Parker, 2016, 221). This is not to say that explicit racist attitudes have

evaporated from circulation in academia, however, they have certainly waned in recent years. As a general rule, overt racial prejudice can be characterized as maintaining a negative sentiment towards black people and other ethnic minorities by believing that in some way, they are inferior to whites (Huddy & Feldman, 2009, 425). These manifestations of racial prejudice could be perceived as the dominant indicator of measuring the racist attitudes of an individual for decades prior to contemporary research (Cramer, 2019, 154). As a variety of social norms began to establish themselves following the Civil Rights movement, scholars would begin to distance themselves from exploring the popular conception of racism that deals primarily with the belief of group inferiority (Cramer, 2019, 154).

Instead, racism could also be conceived as a set of beliefs related to how different ethnic groups do not abide by the established social customs of hard work and patriotism, and how these generalizations of group-based decisions would reflect the existing social and economic disparities (Cramer, 2019, 154). Attitudes falling under this scope would be characterized as symbolic racism, which holds its roots through early socialization processes, and through the exchange of information from figures of authority, social and religious institutions, and the media (Cramer, 2019, 154). The concept of symbolic racism boasts a number of additional titles, such as racial resentment, or modern racism, but each of these measures fall under a thematic umbrella that echoes support for the idea that ethnic minorities, and black people more specifically are both demanding and undeserving of government programs designed to redress the issues coinciding with systemic racism (Huddy & Feldman, 2009, 425). The operationalization of measures for symbolic racism in recent years has been dominated by the racial resentment scale, of which many of the previous studies we have discussed have employed to use alongside public opinion changes

in American healthcare, and on support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election (Tesler, 2009, Sebastian Parker, 2016).

In many instances, attempts to measure racial resentment have been met with difficulties by a number of authors (Berinsky, 1999, Kuklinski et al., 1997). As social norms and customs related to egalitarian concepts have evolved over recent decades, many social psychologists have highlighted the normative pressures that coincide with the willingness for respondents to honestly answer questions pertaining to race (Huddy & Feldman, 2009, 433). Naturally, dishonest responses that relate to racial opinions could lead to a series of inaccurate depiction of public sentiment on the front of racial attitudes. Moving in tandem with the theoretical components of symbolic racism, many researchers highlight that even those who express racially liberal opinions on the surface might exhibit hidden racist tendencies that have been internalized as a result of early socialization when the topic race is made less salient (Huddy & Feldman, 2009, 435). In response to these measurement issues, a number of researchers would begin to use implicit testing models to measure racial prejudice (Ottaway et al., 2001, Saujani, 2003, Mendelberg, 2001). Examples of implicit cues would include political advertisements that pair images of African Americans with hidden meanings pertaining to social issues revolving around crime, poverty, and joblessness (Mendelberg, 2001, 72).

Much of this work would highlight that in order to elicit racial prejudice in the contemporary context, the language used in political advertising and speeches by public officials should not include explicit appeals as a result of the prevailing set of egalitarians norms in America (Mendelberg, 2001, 76). From the perspective of Mendelberg, implicit cues were enacted as part of the Willie Horton advertisements used by the Bush campaign in 1988 and led to a significant

change in racial attitudes among whites following the release of these advertisements (Mendelberg, 2001, 8). The research of Mendelberg, would later be steeped in a controversial debate over the utility of the IAT (see Hubert & Lapinski, 2006, 2008 and Mendelberg, 2008). Across two nationally representative samples, the authors provided respondents with political advertisements that invoked a combination of implicit, explicit, neutral, and counter-stereotypical cues across four separate control groups to test the Mendelberg's hypothesis (Hubert & Lapinski, 2006, 421). Although explicit racial appeals were less well-received than implicit appeals across all groups (ibid 2006, 427), the authors found that the measured effects of predispositions from the implicit control group were not greater than those included in the explicit, neutral and counter-stereotypical groups, and were not statistically significant (ibid, 2006, 430-31). Despite the valid criticisms of the IAT, other authors have moved past the debates revolving around whether explicit or implicit cues are the most reliable measures for determining racist attitudes, and have used a combination of both models to better understand the evolution of both implicit and explicit cues in recent years (Valentino et al, 2018, 759). What the authors would find based on recent survey analyses, however, would be jarring.

Despite the use of both implicit and explicit measures to examine responses to questions related to racial policies in America from four cross-panel studies taken from 2010 to 2012, Valentino et al. demonstrate how racial attitudes form the basis of attitudes tied to public healthcare and social spending, regardless if individuals were provided with implicit or explicit racial cues (Valentino et al., 2018, 765-766). For all intents and purposes, racial attitudes remained stagnant on behalf of some respondents when prompted with no implicit or explicit cues, and from instances where blatant disparagement of African Americans was implied in the questionnaires (Valentino et al., 2018, 768). Applications of the implicit test had failed in every instance when accounting

for racist attitudes primarily because of how stagnant responses of overt racism were present in their research experiment (Valentino et al., 2018, 769). In their concluding remarks, the authors highlight that in recent years, many whites have begun to view themselves as a disadvantaged group in society by maintaining stronger perceived ingroup identities, and a more amenable outlook on intolerance towards outgroups (ibid, 2018, 768). Valentino et al distance themselves from the popular conception of the Trump effect for giving rise to these overtly racist attitudes, by aligning their stance with the work of Tesler (2018, 769). Once Obama had taken office, the authors highlight how many whites would perceive the election of the first black President of the United States as a "... perceived moral licence to express more critical attitudes about minorities" (2018, 769).

The statements made by a number of the authors included throughout this section can be reduced to two central themes. The first can be characterized as a general development of contempt towards outgroups among white Americans fueled by explicit racism, and racial resentment (Tesler, 2009, Valentino et al., 2018, Huddy & Feldman, 2009). The second can be traced to perceived threat directed towards individuals or groups who jeopardize the existing status quo of social conventions (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). Both of these themes that can be marked as factors that contributed to the racialization in American politics and political polarization in general boast a considerable overlap with the central theoretical tenets of RWA and SDO that have been discussed in previous sections (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996, Pratto et al, 1994). What has yet to be mentioned deals with the utilities associated with bundling both RWA and SDO as measures to in order to identify explicit racist attitudes.

Given the variety of ways that racism can be assessed through the associated measures of explicit racist attitudes, symbolic racism, and ethnocentrism, it should come as no surprise that locating acceptable measures is integral for use if scholars are to produce further literature related to racist attitudes (Cramer, 2020, 159). As discussed in previous sections, both RWA and SDO possess reliable properties to determine racist attitudes on the basis of perceived ingroup-outgroup hostility related to group dominance for SDO, and perceived threat from RWA (Pratto et al, 1994, Altemeyer, 1981). An interesting finding that bears relevance to both of these attitudinal measures can be traced to Sibley et al, that highlights how a combination of RWA and SDO boast additive effects across a series of group-based attitudes that relate to racial prejudice (2006, 759). Further studies would highlight how those who score high in both RWA and SDO were both positively related to maintaining racist attitudes both explicitly and symbolically (Van Hiele & Mervielde, 2005, 2333).

At the core, these authors would maintain that those exhibiting tendencies that match the scope of RWA and SDO will be more likely to exhibit racist attitudes, and would likely be amenable to identifying with groups of individuals who are not likely to think independently, are blindly faithful to figures of authority included in their respective ingroups, and believe they are morally superior to others (Sibley et al., 2006, 765). Those falling under this scope would be among the most likely to also endorse democratic backslide, and the emergence of authoritarian-style forms of leadership (Sibley et al, 2006., 766). The conclusion of this section brings us to the important question of the implications of being thrown into an increasingly polarized and racialized political climate during an individual's formative years, and more specifically during an era where authoritarian tendencies and racist attitudes have become increasingly prevalent in western society (Kimmel, 2013, 24). The answers to these questions will provide us with the tools

required to further identify the relationship between authoritarian attitudes and young adults in recent times.

Section IV – The Authoritarian Youth

5.1 – Social Isolation and Aggrieved Entitlement

Drawing from *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno et al. highlight that authoritarian attitudes tend to be fostered as a result of familial dynamics in the formative years of a child (Adorno et al., 1950, 316). The Freudian framework highlights how unresolved tensions between a child and their parental figures who emphasize rigid adherence to traditional familial structures and social structures hold the capacity to lead to the development of a fractured and immature ego (Adorno et al., 1950, 317). These forms of repressed resentment directed toward parental figures is expressed outwardly to society as a whole as an individual's need to conform to figures of authority, and rigid societal customs (Adorno et al., 1950, 317). After Freudian theories fell in popularity in academic scholarship, Altemeyer would later emphasize a similar theme of young adults developing authoritarian attitudes from the processes of early socialization with parents who express similar attitudes that coincide with RWA (1996, 80).

The rise of far-right attitudes can be traced to confusion, aggression, and feelings of threat when authoritarian individuals are exposed to the emergence of public figures and social movements that do not correspond with their preference for rigid adherence to societal norms and customs (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994; Kimmel, 2013). As a result of these feelings of confusion and threat, authoritarian-minded individuals may also be inclined to experience sentiments of social withdrawal and alienation when their respective worldviews are challenged (Kircht & Dillehay, 1967, 79). Claims related to the experiences of social isolation as a by-product

immense social changes have been far from an anomaly when providing accounts for the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, either. (Arendt, 1951, 472).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt characterizes the sentiments of isolation and loneliness as being among the dominant factors that gave rise to organizations such as the NSDAP (Arendt, 1951, 472). In these instances, those who were stricken by existential crises that emerged from the devastation coinciding with the First World War, the Great Depression, and the delegitimization of social authorities such as the church led to substantial amounts of isolation at the individual level (Arendt, 1951, 477). As a result, those who felt stripped of their existential purpose sought to re-establish these sentiments by absorbing themselves in extreme political ideologies (Arendt, 1951, 469). Arendt posits that the costs associated with becoming engrossed in the fascistic ideological movements during the first half of the twentieth century led to the erasure of the personality at the individual level, and replaced them with themes associated with the “greater causes” that aligned with the central components of fascism, such as support for the eradication of different ethnic groups that were not deemed to be worthy of living for the purposes of the “scientific” advancement of a perceived superior race (Arendt, 1951, 471).

Though Arendt’s characterization of the rise of totalitarian regimes does not speak to young people specifically, it does speak to the processes that individuals experience when their perceptions of the world are stripped of a higher orderly purpose, and how in some circumstances, this may lead to the endorsement of extreme political ideologies (Arendt, 1951, 471). Kircht and Dillehay highlight how the process of authoritarian isolation can be considered as a two-fold process (1967, 81). The first component of authoritarian isolation represents the perceived collapse in the normative foundations of a particular social group, and the second can be characterized as issues that hold their roots in the early socialization process on an individual basis (Kircht &

Dillehay, 1967, 81). The authors also assert the importance of how authoritarian isolation has the capacity to develop as a result of early familial dynamics between a child and their parents (Kircht & Dillehay, 1967, 82). Based on these criteria, we can explore how these issues related to authoritarian isolation can be relevant among young white males in the contemporary context.

In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel points to the aspects of contemporary isolation as one of the catalysts to be credited with the emergence of violent acts that have been carried out under the banner of right-wing extremism (Kimmel, 2013, 70). As greater calls for social and policy decisions in America continue to shift towards redressing the issues that coincide with systemic racism, gender disparity, and prejudice against newcomers, Kimmel asserts his central explanation to describe why a latent activation of authoritarian attitudes have occurred in recent years (Kimmel, 2013, 31). Kimmel describes this phenomenon as aggrieved entitlement, which highlights how groups of white men feel as though their status as the “rightful heirs” to the inheritance of systemic privilege across the continuum of race and gender in America has been stolen by out of touch members of the government (2013, 31). Moreover, those subscribing to this idea also believe that their privileges have been awarded to “undeserving” groups, such as women, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community (Kimmel, 2013, 31).

The sentiments that coincide with aggrieved entitlement are not only limited to adult men and have been exhibited by an increasing number of young white males in recent decades (Kimmel, 2013, 84). These attitudes are largely explored through the lens of school shootings in America, the majority of which have been carried out by young white school-aged males (Kimmel, 2013, 71). Many of these students were fixated on issues related to social status and hyper-masculinity as a result of being humiliated and socially isolated from their peers (Kimmel, 2013, 74). Many of these young men have been motivated in committing these shootings to obtain vengeance and a

perceived sense of respect from their peers, which is described as Kimmel as a further symptom of aggrieved entitlement (2013, 75).

The acts of committing mass shootings are among the most extreme examples of the outcomes attached to aggrieved entitlement among young white men, however, these attitudes have also manifested in ways that have yielded less-devastating outcomes with even larger groups of young white men (Nili, 2020, 416). The most striking example of authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice that included a larger circle of young white men can be traced to the events that unfolded in Charlottesville, where a significant proportion of those who decided to march while bearing Hitler-youth style torches consisted of young white men who collectively identified under the banner of the alt-right (Nili, 2020, 417).

Both Arendt and Kimmel's characterizations of social isolation and aggrieved entitlement boast a series of striking similarities to one another. The aspects of social alienation and ideological obsession in the wake of existential confusion described by Arendt coincide heavily with the sentiments of some white men who believe their dominant societal status has been stolen by women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities (Kimmel, 2013, 31). Moreover, these themes bear a striking resemblance to the previously mentioned work revolving around RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice (Adorno, 1950; Pratto et al, 1994; Altemeyer, 1996). The dynamics that are attached to the measurement and operationalization of RWA connect to the willingness of people to replace their sense of individuality with rigid levels of social conformity with extreme political ideology (Arendt, 1951, Altemeyer, 1981). In the case of both RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice alike, the same can be said about the contempt that white men exhibit toward perceived outgroups, which aligns with Kimmel's central hypothesis of aggrieved entitlement (2013, 14). Sentiments revolving around a disdain for ethnic and religious minorities, and a staunch opposition to immigration, bear

a striking resemblance to the types of messaging and actions taken by groups such as the Proud Boys, and other far-right extremist groups that have largely consisted of young white men in recent years (DeCook, 2018, 485). For these reasons, it is important to highlight how Kimmel's characterization of aggrieved entitlement, and the measures associated with RWA and SDO have the capacity to intersect with the apparent growth in participation in these organizations among young white men (DeCook, 2018, 486).

5.2 – RWA and SDO in Young Adults

Though these intersections are apparent, it is important to highlight how recent studies have assessed and operationalized measures for RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice among young adults. As disclosed in our previous subsection, when considering the theoretical underpinnings of authoritarianism and racial prejudice, a common theme that entraps these phenomena can be traced to how they are, at least in part, a socially learned process that children and young adults experience in their formative years (Adorno et al., 1950; Arednt, 1951; Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994; Cramer 2019). Though the Freudian approaches to the study of authoritarianism have been largely discredited over the course of the last 50 years, a common account related to how both authoritarian and racist attitudes are acquired by children and young adults can be attached to family dynamics, and parental relationships through the formative years of childhood and adolescence (Dureiz & Soenens, 2009, 906).

In recent years, a growing amount of research has focused on the transfer of racist and authoritarian attitudes from parents to their children, particularly along the continuum of RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice (Katz, 2003; Doyle, 1996). A previous drawback in earlier literature in

this domain would be that earlier studies only measured parental figures in isolation, as opposed to measuring the attitudes of both parents as a whole (Katz, 2003; Doyle, 1996). Duriez and Soenens redressed these earlier issues by creating a study that included both parents and their children of an adolescent age in an effort to account for the intergenerational transmission of RWA, SDO, and racist attitudes (2009, 906). The primary analysis determined that parental levels of racism were strong predictors of levels of adolescent racism (Dureiz & Soenens, 2009, 908) The second model was designed to determine the mediational role that RWA and SDO would play when predicting the parental-child relationship of racist attitudes. This determined that once the measures of RWA and SDO were introduced, the racist attitudes of parents were rendered non-significant. (Duriez & Soenens, 2009, 908) The final models determined that the linkage between parental RWA and SDO as it relates to parental racism were predictive of adolescent RWA and SDO, which in turn would lead to a higher proportion of racist attitudes in the adolescent sample (Duriez & Soenens, 2009, 909)

This article concludes by affirming the initial predictions which posited the existence of a relationship between the transfer of racist attitudes from parents to children that is heavily mediated by the intergenerational similarities of exhibiting attitudes that match the criteria of RWA and SDO (Duriez & Soenens, 2009, 909) Similarities in racist attitudes between parents and children were nearly eliminated after introducing the values of RWA and SDO into the study, implying that this transmission of racism is likely predicated on the idea of a parent-to-child transfer of ideology (Duriez & Soenens, 2009, 909). As the years continue to pass, it has become increasingly apparent that Altemeyer's claims about how authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice tend to solidify during the period of adolescence are being challenged by a growing

amount of literature that demonstrate that these sentiments may develop at an even earlier age (Kandler et al., 2016; Ruffman et al., 2020).

A recent study completed by Ruffman et al. assesses a similar scope of information when compared to Duriez & Soenens, however, the samples of child respondents included in their work focused on those from the ages of five to twelve as opposed to those of an adolescent age (Ruffman et al., 2020, 11). With the use of VR equipment, the child respondents were exposed to a selection of animated avatars consisting of the same or different ethnic groups and were subsequently tasked with choosing one of the avatars to be the first to receive assistance from the child (Ruffman et al., 2020, 12). Children who selected an avatar that corresponded with their respective ethnic group were represented as having an ethnic bias, and these results were cross-examined with their parents who completed a separate questionnaire for RWA and SDO scales. Following this analysis, the results boasted a positive correlation between the parents of children who scored high on RWA and SDO, and greater levels of ethnic bias among their children (Ruffman et al., 2020, 14). The evidence of how the intergenerational transfer of RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice from parents to children can provide researchers with indispensable information that can be used to understand how authoritarian attitudes can develop externally. But how do these theories bode in the domain of human genetics?

In recent years, many authors have demonstrated success in identifying patterns in various genomes to predict the development of specific political attitudes and behaviours revolving around voter turnout, efficacy, and ideology (Alfred et al., 2005; Fowler & Dawes, 2010; Brader et al., 2012). Recent research has also provided a specific focus towards the genetic influence of RWA and SDO on the development of individual attitudes, while identifying considerably strong evidence of the connection between these attitudes and genetic patterns through twin pair analyses

(Funk et al., 2013, 815). Moreover, Kandler et al. conduct a similar project that measures a significant linkage between additional twin samples to highlight further evidence in support of the genetic heritability of RWA and SDO (Kandler et al., 2016, 415). The authors highlight that in the broader scope of assessing human behaviour, genetic inheritance of RWA and SDO can also account for positive assortative mating, or the tendency for likeminded individuals to select each other as mates as a result of similar behavioural phenotypes, which would yield an even greater likelihood for the transferral of these attitudes to their offspring (Kandler et al., 2016, 415).

Though these accounts of the genetic inheritance as they relate to RWA and SDO provide researchers with valuable insights that speak to how authoritarian attitudes can be enhanced by genetic predispositions, the inheritance of these genes only account for a partial portion of the equation (Meeusen & Dhont, 2015, 586). This would be due to the sheer importance of the factors that can be attributed to the processes of early socialization from parents to children, along with the additive presence of various institutional and social factors that have the capacity to shape the attitudes of children from an early age (Cramer, 2009; Dhont, 2015). Though the value of observing the effects of genetic predispositions as they relate to political attitudes should not be downplayed, it is equally as important to consider the implications that coincide with being socialized in settings that foster sentiments that coincide with the central tents of RWA, SDO, and racial prejudice (Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Ruffman et al., 2020). As discussed in our previous subsection, the emergence of a number of social groups and political figures who espouse hateful and antidemocratic opinions have seen a palpable increase in support from socially withdrawn young white men in America, as an effect of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel, 2013, 16). This support can be largely attributed to the parental upbringing and institutional changes that have

placed many white youths under the impression that they have lost their just desserts of the socio-economic privileges that previous white generations have received (Kimmel, 2013, 31).

In order to understand how various aspects of early socialization shape or enhance authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice in young adults, it is important to place a focus on social phenomena that are specifically relevant to the lives of young adults who have expressed these attitudes in recent years (DeCook, 2018). Not only have researchers demonstrated that RWA and SDO can be used to predict prejudicial attitudes among young adults, but have also proved that these attitudes have grown as a result of the levels of collective encouragement groups of young white men have received from public figures and those that are proximally close to their social circles who espouse these views in recent years (Barkun, 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021). In recent decades, the consumption of information from various social circles, the media, and public officials have manifested in ways that are not just physically exclusive, as a result of the emergence of contemporary informational vacuums. (Jost et al., 2018).

Despite an array of external factors that can be attributed to the growth of authoritarian attitudes in young adults, one particular phenomenon that has played an integral role in the socialization for young adults in the contemporary context is the rapid expansion of information systems that fall under the scope of new media (Barkun, 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021). These findings bear a particular amount of importance in the broader scope of designing research to measure the rise in authoritarian and prejudicial attitudes among young white men in recent years, primarily because a significant portion of young individuals have been exposed to extremist political content on the internet during this time period (Costello et al., 2020; DeCook, 2018; Barkun, 2017). Given that the rise of web 2.0 has had a significant impact on young adults who have spent their formative years using these online platforms, could these informational vacuums

boast additive effects related to the activation of authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice? We will discuss these corresponding impacts in the section below.

Section V – Media Fragmentation and Social Networks

6.1 – From Print Media to TV Stations; Early Accounts of Media Fragmentation

One of the prevailing themes from our section on the racialization of American politics highlights how a marked divide in elite discourse in recent years has contributed to greater levels of racial prejudice (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, Tesler, 2009). It is also apparent that public opinion is at least in some way enhanced by informational cues provided by campaign messages and policy stances crafted by political elites (Converse, 1960, Mendelberg, 2001). With these considerations in mind, it is equally as important to highlight the role that information conveyed by the media has played in setting the public agenda, and more importantly, how the creation of informational vacuums in recent years has led to the development of extremist attitudes among young adults (Iyengar & Kinder 1987, Gallaher, 2021).

It is evident that the media has undergone significant transformative changes as a result of the emergence of web 2.0 (Jost et al., 2018, Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Authors who have explored the relationship between the public digestion of informational cues from the media in the contemporary context have highlighted the utility of the work of Kinder and Iyengar that provide a strong theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon in greater detail (Jost et al., 2018, Laintian et al., 2018). One of the central themes from Kinder and Iyengar’s *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* is the “agenda setting effect”, whereby the levels of

public awareness on particular issues will depend on the levels of media coverage that these issues receive by the press and television networks (Kinder & Iyengar, 1987, 17).

In this book, the authors created a series of fourteen experiments where respondents were shown a selection of specific television footage that would include coverage revolving around policy issues such as unemployment, national defense, and energy strategies (Kinder & Iyengar, 1987, 46). Certain control groups received more coverage on specific policy issues than in others, but the common theme across each time-series study highlighted how questionnaire responses would correlate positively with the policy issues that received the most coverage in each respective control group when respondents were asked about what they believed to be the most pressing issues in America (Kinder & Iyengar, 1987, 54). The authors' "priming" hypothesis follows a similar pattern, where the types of coverage included in these experiments proved to activate or enhance how respondents assessed presidential performance along the partisan dimension (Kinder & Iyengar, 1987, 82). Identified Republicans and Democrats were more responsive to issues that fell under the fold of partisan themes and were more likely to assess the performance of political leaders based on these issues (Kinder & Iyengar, 1987, 89). Although Kinder and Iyengar highlight the impact of television coverage on public opinion, the corresponding effects for other mediums of information would only accelerate in an unprecedented fashion in the decades that would follow (Gallaher, 2021, 226).

6.2 – Web 2.0, Misinformation, and Goosestepping with your Fingertips

In the following years, members of the public obtained access to an expanding network of news programs that possessed the capacity to enhance perceptual partisan biases (Jerit & Barabas, 2012, 680). More importantly, this era was marked by rapid growth of user accessibility for the internet (Anderson, 2012, 54). The emergence of what is popularly referred to as web 2.0 can be

characterized as an explosive increase in the use of the internet by individuals (Anderson, 2012, 3). During this time, individuals began to engage in newly discovered ways of producing and sharing different mediums of online content (Anderson, 2012, 3). Included in the mix was the creation of online platforms, where individuals and organizations would have the ability to create and share content that could be circulated across an audience of millions in little to no time (Anderson, 2012, 7). As platform giants such as YouTube and Facebook began to solidify themselves as a dominant presence in the circulation of online content, so did the capacity for political organizations, activist groups, and private citizens to express their views on an array of issues across the socio-political domain (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, 467).

The circulation of these ideas would lead to revolutionary changes in the way that political organizations and interest groups would manage their respective campaigns (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, 468). The 2008 Obama campaign served as an exemplary case of how campaign fundraising, membership recruitment, and advertising could be effectively circulated into the public through the use of social networks, and the internet in general (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011, 209). Despite the practical implications that coincide with the use of social networks for established public figures, the ability to spread messages and content to millions of individuals can also be accomplished by anyone who has access to the internet, which can lead to many positive, and many nefarious outcomes (Barkun, 2017, 438).

One of the central issues that relate to media consumption at the individual level as a result of the rise of web 2.0 can be attributed to the fact that the mediums of information the public chooses to digest is entirely personalized (Lewandowski et al, 2017, 356). As opposed to tuning in to the few television channels or reading the few pieces of print media that were available thirty years ago, individuals are now capable of digesting an immense amount of information, that is

often catered to their own respective political opinions, policy attitudes, and ideology (Barkun, 2017, 439). A diet of information that coincides largely with the political attitudes of individuals can also be extended to the social pressures that groups of social media users experience once they begin to add or follow likeminded friends on these networks (Jost et al., 2018, 110). According to Jost et al, individuals who occupy similar spaces of online networks will be placed in similar virtual “realities”, where those who share similar political attitudes will have their opinions reinforced as a result of consuming the same forms of information as those included in their friendship networks (Jost et al., 2018, 111).

Since social media and other forms of online content that fall under the scope of web 2.0 do not require peer-review or syndication to be absorbed by its viewers, the chances of being exposed to political misinformation are high (Lewandowski et al., 2017, 355). This is highlighted by Lewandowski et al., where the authors assert that the degree of truthfulness attached to various social media posts and memes are not necessary in order to receive widespread attention, and how these trends have slowly slipped their way into the highest levels of political discourse in recent years (Lewandowski et al., 2017, 356). An alarming issue that relates to the action of processing false political information can be traced to the lack of willingness individuals will exhibit in rescinding their support for false information as a result of the continued influence effect (Lewandowsky et al., 2012 115). An individual’s worldview may also lead to backfire effects regarding misinformation, where a correction of false information will crystalize their pre-existing beliefs even further (Lewandowski et al., 2012, 119). The possibility of consuming false information, and having those beliefs reinforced through a positive feedback loop of worldviews paints an even more troubling picture if we are to consider the types of figures who become popularized when espousing these views (Barkun, 2017, 438).

In his study, Barkun highlights the phenomena of “mainstreaming the fringe”, which speaks to the drastic changes of information availability since the emergence of web 2.0, and how the barrier between mainstream information and fringe ideas has been shattered (Barkun, 2017, 438). As a result, the endorsement of conspiracy theories could grow, leading to greater levels of public support for the theories themselves, and those who espouse them (Barkun, 2017, 439). Even prior to his initial campaign launch for President of the United States, Donald Trump had associated himself with the “birther” movement – a widely circulated conspiracy theory that Barack Obama was not an American-born citizen (Barkun, 2017, 439). Once Trump had officially declared his candidacy, a disorganized selection of groups consisting of the white supremacists, anti-Semites, and conspiracy theorists held under the disorganized banner of the Alt-right echoed their support for his Presidential bid (Barkun, 2017, 439). During the same time, conspiracy theories revolving around “the great replacement” – a racist conspiracy theory insinuating that white populations are deliberately being displaced by immigrants and ethnic groups - would also be popularized through various online circles (Van Der Bulk & Hyzen, 2020, 44). More importantly, endorsement of an assortment of far-right conspiracy theories have been found to correlate highly with RWA and SDO (Kerr & Wilson, 2021, 552).

The unprecedented increase of misinformation and conspiracy theories that have grown in tandem with the rise of web 2.0 over the last decade can be associated with an increased likelihood of supporting and participation in the spread of conspiracy theories among those predisposed to RWA and SDO (Kerr & Wilson, 2021; Hawdon et al., 2019). The process of participating in online extremism draws a number of parallels to the theory of online friendship networks developed by Jost et al., where those who use social media and various online platforms will selectively follow and befriend likeminded individuals whose views on a variety of social and political affairs align

with their own (2018, 110). Not only do those who participate in these networks experience social approval from their peers for expressing aligning views, but they are also pressured to conform to these beliefs, lest they be denounced by their peers (Jost et al., 2018; Zeng & Schäfer, 2021). As a result of their own ideological volition, and the social approval received from espousing extremist conspiratorial thinking, those who score higher in RWA and SDO are at risk of being thrown into a positive feedback loop that self-perpetuates (Lewandowski et al., 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021).

With the rise in racial resentment and authoritarian attitudes during the Bush and Obama eras (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Tesler, 2012), it should come as no surprise that the expansion of alternative media echoing support for conspiracy theories, and explicit acts of prejudice would manifest as a result of the growing number public officials who espoused these sentiments in recent years (Barkun, 2017, 439). The Presidential campaign of Donald Trump was met with widespread support from far-right extremist groups that actively circulated misinformation on anonymous online forums that to this day are steeped in conspiracy theories pertaining to previously mentioned topics such as “the great replacement” and Pizzagate (Barkun, 2017; Tutters et al., 2018). Pizzagate was a widely circulated conspiracy theory during the 2016 American Presidential election that postulated how officials belonging to the Democratic party are members of an occult pedophile ring (Barkun, 2017; Tutters et al., 2018). The widespread circulation of online extremist content can be considered an additional catalyst that relates to the growing prevalence of explicitly racist attitudes in American Society (Barkun, 2017; DeCook, 2018; Kerr & Wilson, 2021).

The apparent overlap between the increase in authoritarian and prejudicial attitudes and the growth of online extremist content also boasts a connection that relates to Kimmel’s conception of aggrieved entitlement (2013, 16). A great deal of right-wing extremist content evokes resentment towards the perceived increase in status of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and women

in present times, while echoing sentiments of nostalgia for eras where white males carried a dominant status in society (DeCook, 2018, 487). Extreme online advocacy that concerns itself primarily with a desire to return to an era that is steeped in chauvinism and racial superiority among whites bears a striking resemblance to Kimmel's depiction of how white males in America have aggressively reacted to their perceived loss of status in contemporary society (DeCook, 2018; Kimmel, 2013). Since a number of these far-right conspiracy theories that are conceived in informational vacuums boast a considerable overlap with many of the symptoms of aggrieved entitlement that has affected larger circles of white men (see Kimmel, 2017; Barkun, 2017; Zeng & Schäfer, 2021), it is important for us to narrow our focus to better understand why these issues bear specific importance for younger individuals in the contemporary context.

A salient point that relates to the rise of web 2.0 in general is how young adults growing up with steady access to a variety of internet platforms has likely had significant impacts on how they are socialized in their early to teenage years (DeCook, 2018, 485). Moreover, having access to a limitless number of internet platforms could lead young adults towards an early exposure to the political arena, and the ability to consume content that is steeped in political ideology (DeCook, 2018, 485). In some cases, online platforms have provided young adults with the ability to foster stronger levels of democratic engagement, but in other cases, have rendered them able to view and spread online hate (Costello et al., 2020, 719).

Evidence would point towards the likelihood that greater exposure to online hate leads to a higher likelihood of spreading hateful messages (Costello et al., 2020, 717). These results would be particularly pronounced among those in the sample who reported the highest amounts of internet use (Costello et al., 2020, 716). It is also important to highlight that young white male adolescents were surveyed as the most likely group to come across online hate in this study

(Costello et al., 2020, 714). If we draw from some of the principle themes that relate to social isolation from Arendt and Kirscht, along with Kimmel's depiction of aggrieved entitlement that groups of white men are experiencing from our previous section on authoritarianism in young adults, one should consider the potential impacts of extended online use on this particular group, especially among those who are predisposed to RWA and SDO (Duriez & Soenens, 2009, 907). This question highlights how alt-right organizations such as the Proud Boys have used social media as an instrument for recruiting young men to their ranks with the circulation of popular internet memes (DeCook, 2018, 487). If young white men have been exposed, and in many cases, encouraged by others to digest and echo support for racist content that overlaps with the central tenets of RWA and SDO (see Kimmel, 2013), this paper hypothesizes that such measures can be operationalized to understand the emergence of racist attitudes among young white male adolescents in recent years. We will explore how the measures identified throughout this literature review can be applied in future research in the following section.

Section VII – Research Program Proposal

7.1 – Avenues for a Research Program

Over the course of our literature review, we have demonstrated the rise in authoritarian attitudes, and by extension, the activation of latent racist attitudes in recent years as a by-product of the racialization of public policies in America (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Tesler, 2009). We have highlighted the practical application for the measures of RWA and SDO that can be used to assess authoritarian attitudes, along with their connections to explicit racist attitudes and racial resentment (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al, 1994; Van Hiele & Mervielde, 2005). We have

considered how this selection of measures have been applied in the greater scope of assessing the attitudes of RWA and SDO in young adults, and how they are predictive of racial prejudice and racial bias (Dureiz & Soenens, 2009; Ruffman et al, 2020). Moreover, we have established how the sentiments of social isolation and aggrieved entitlement among young white men have been instrumentalized by far-right organizations in recent years as a method to encourage this group of individuals to engage in online hate, and in some instances, to partake in violent demonstrations (DeCook, 2018; Costello et al., 2020). Though the work of Costello et al. provides the reader with proof that more exposure to politically charged online hate may render young adults more likely to participate in this practise (2020, 717), there has yet to be any research published in the domain of how exposure to extreme online political content may affect young individuals who score higher in RWA and SDO.

Many of the central movements that can be attributed to the circulation of far-right extremist hate groups are steeped in the spread of resentment towards women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities under the pretense that white men are losing their status of dominance in society and are entitled to reclaim it (Van Der Bulk & Hyzen, 2020, 41). These forms of messaging overlap considerably with Kimmel's conception of aggrieved entitlement, and the characterization of social isolation made by Kircht and Dillehay. For these reasons we posit that these messaging strategies may have the capacity to boast an even stronger connection to young white men who have been socialized in a manner that emphasizes a rigid adherence to traditional societal customs and contempt towards perceived outgroups. For these reasons, we propose that there exists a great deal of potential for future researchers for establishing a program designed to assess the additive effects that exposure to online extremist content may bear on explicitly racist attitudes and racial prejudice for white male adolescents who are both genetically and socially predisposed to both

RWA and SDO. We will discuss how a research program of this variety could be completed in the following subsection.

7.2 - Causal Design, Methodology, and Expectations

One of the fortunate aspects that coincide with identifying practical and reliable measures for authoritarian attitudes is that they have already been established (Altemeyer, 1981, Pratto et al, 1994). For these reasons, our independent variables for this program will be putting the measures of RWA and SDO to use. As preciously discussed, authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice can largely be described as a socially learned process (Altemeyer, 1996; Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Huddy & Feldman, 2009). In the line of causal linkages, behaviours and attitudes learned from an early age precede and predict the later expression of explicit racist attitudes (Pratto, 1994; Altemeyer, 1996), which will serve as our dependent variable for this proposed program. We will borrow the measurement for explicit racist attitudes from questionnaires on racial prejudice and stereotyping that have been made available through previous ANES surveys.¹

At the core, the central aim of this program is to explore the additive effects of individual exposure to extreme online political content among young white adolescents on latently racist attitudes who score high in the measures of RWA and SDO. This would imply that the moderating variable included in this proposed experiment will be characterized as the exposure to politically extreme online content. As a result, we will be required to construct measures for doing so. For this, we will borrow from the work completed in Costello et al. that operationalized the measure for exposure to online hate as a function of the individual amount of time a respondent uses the internet on a daily basis (measured in hours), the websites they use the most frequently, and the

¹ Access to this questionnaire is available through the following link: <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/2020-time-series-study/>

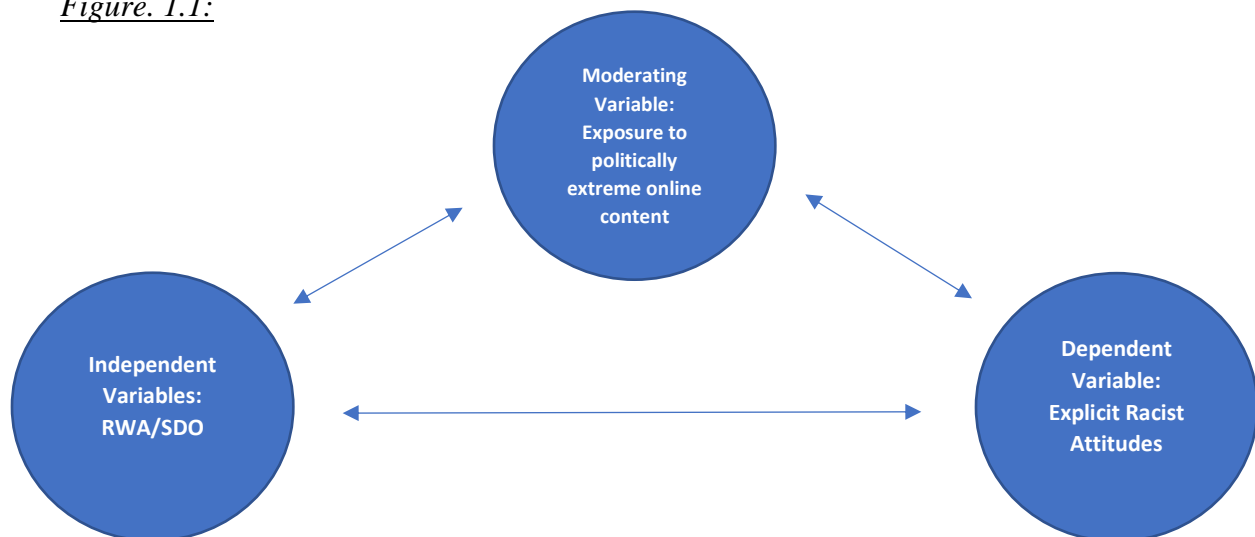
amount of online hate a respondent reports coming across (2020, 718). We will measure the amount of time respondents spend on the internet but will modify the selection of websites that individuals visit the most frequently. The risk of social desirability may prevent respondents from disclosing their exposure to using websites that are known for their politically extreme content such as 4chan and stormfront. For these reasons, we will create response categories for the use of social networks (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), and a category labelled as “Alternative Media”. We would also modify the questionnaire from Costello et al. by changing the response measures for “exposure to online hate” to “exposure to politically extreme online content”. The highest associated measures for time spent online, the use of alternative online media, and an exposure to politically extreme online content will be coded as 1, while the lowest possible scores in these categories will be coded as a zero.

For the purposes of facilitating this research program, we will require a sample of white male adolescents between the ages of thirteen and nineteen to complete the aforementioned questionnaires that incorporate the attitudinal scales of RWA, and SDO. (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994). These respondents would also be provided with the questionnaire set included in the ANES that measure the levels of explicit racial prejudice. Finally, these respondents will be provided with a set of questions designed to measure our “exposure to politically extreme online content” variable. The first step following this collection of data will be designed to simply measure the relationship between our independent and dependent variables. The second step to this program will be to introduce our moderating variable in order to measure the interactive effects of exposure to politically extreme online content on RWA/SDO, and explicitly racist attitudes. As disclosed in the previous section, there is growing evidence that exposure to extremist online content leads to greater circulation of online hate (Costello et al., 2020; DeCook, 2018). Because

of this, we believe that those who are predisposed to RWA and SDO at a young age will be more likely to exhibit explicitly racist attitudes if they are exposed to extremist online content more frequently than others. To summarize, our model will be designed to demonstrate how the antecedent factors of RWA and SDO have a direct effect on explicitly racist attitudes, but the inclusion of our moderating variable, an exposure to politically extreme online content, will increase this effect indirectly.

One additional factor that is important to highlight deals with the ethical implications of any future studies. In our literature review, we have identified how those who are predisposed to RWA and SDO are far more likely to engage in far-right conspiracy theories online (Barkun, 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021). Since this research is primarily concerned with young white men who score higher in RWA and SDO when compared to their peers, it is paramount that a study does not actively expose these individuals to extremist content or conspiracy theories that could activate prejudicial attitudes, or create them (Barkun, 2017; Costello et al., 2020). By using a questionnaire to indicate what types of online content are consumed, researchers can determine whether or not the respondents are consuming online extremist content without providing further exposure among those who may be at risk of developing extremist attitudes.

Figure. 1.1:



Based on the information provided above, we will establish two major expectations that may occur if a research program that follows our suggestions were to be executed. The first expectation will echo the existing body of literature that highlights the positive relationship between those who score high in RWA and SDO, and the expression of explicit racist attitudes (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994; Sibley et al., 2006). The distinguishing factor in this program will point towards further evidence that these attitudes have the capacity of being fostered at an earlier age among young white adolescents. The second expectation of this experiment will highlight how explicitly racist attitudes among young white men who are predisposed to authoritarian attitudes is enhanced by an exposure to politically extreme online content. These potential findings would provide a chilling commentary that reinforces the potential consequences of being socialized in the era of web 2.0, where informational vacuums are reinforced and can be used to justify the prejudicial actions of those who subscribe to extremist political beliefs and ideology (DeCook, 2018; Van Der Bulk & Hyzen, 2020).

Section VIII – Conclusion

8.1 – A Collective Responsibility

The contents of this essay were not designed to echo an over-repeated commentary dealing with how the election of Donald Trump marked a revival of white supremacy in America, because as we have seen, these attitudes were present in American culture several years before the former US President announced his candidacy (Tesler, 2009, Valentino et al., 2018). A more thoughtful reflection on how American society reached a point where the events that unfolded in Charlottesville saw tacit support from a sitting President can be at least partially explained by the growing levels of resentment directed towards ethnic and religious minorities among groups of

white men who endorse the belief that their perceived dominant status in society has been stolen from them (Kimmel, 2013, 14). Moreover, these racist attitudes were able to flourish in tandem with the incendiary rhetoric used by Trump as a consequence of the unravelling of the mainstream media, and the rise of web 2.0 (Barkun, 2017; DeCook, 2018). Individuals were able to place themselves into informational vacuums that coincided with their own prejudicial attitudes, where they received social approval from those who expressed similar political opinions (Barkun, 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021). Each of these factors led to the creation of a perfect storm for those who already possessed authoritarian tendencies to express these attitudes unabashedly (DeCook, 2018; Valentino et al., 2018). An additional point to consider from the broader scope of this literature review has more to do with the Freudian framework of authoritarianism that was echoed by Adorno et al. in the earliest study related to this field of study than one might think (1950, 317).

As expressed by Adorno et al., the actions of an individual exhibiting authoritarian tendencies deals heavily with unresolved tensions in the subconscious mind that are expressed outwardly (1950, 319). In its nascent stages, one of the many factors that coincided with America's declaration of independence from Britain was the legal protection of slavery (Smith, 2018, 257). The institutional roots of America's support for slavery until the late nineteenth century, and segregation until the turn of the twentieth century, continue to manifest in ways that continue to persist in American society today (Smith, 2018, 258). As we have seen in the literature, these manifestations of racism can be attributed to forms of racial resentment, and even explicit racist attitudes, in the contemporary context (Tesler, 2009; Huddy & Feldman, 2009). As some individuals attempted to redress and challenge the issues associated with the institutionally racist structure of America, many of those who were the beneficiaries of this system became embittered as a result of believing that their status of power and domination was being revoked (Kimmel,

2013, 14). Perhaps the authoritarian attitudes that were already present in the minds of so many white Americans simply required a catalyst to be amplified, and in some cases, activated. In some ways, the unprecedented increase in far-right political violence in America serves as a representation of the subconscious activation of the institutionally racist structures that it was founded on (ADL, 2020; Smith, 2018).

Manifestations of the subconscious mind can be extended to the emergence of online extremism in many ways, too. For the first time in history, the world is seeing a generation of children raised in a setting where online platforms are the dominant form of media consumption (DeCook, 2018). For young adults who are growing quickly accustomed to digesting information that coincides with their own opinions and worldviews, the consequences of doing so when the intentions of extreme political organizations is convince these individuals to engage in the spread of intolerance both online and in the real world are nefarious in the best of cases (Barkun, 2017, 439). For young white males who are already predisposed to exhibiting authoritarian tendencies as a result of their social upbringing, the opportunity to anonymously espouse hateful messages online with no consequences has led to devastatingly violent outcomes (Kimmel, 2013; Van Der Bulk & Hyzen, 2020). In some ways, these forms of anonymous online posting can be characterized as a clandestine extension of an individual's subconscious mind at work.

To conclude this literature review, it is important to highlight the breadth of information that was covered and used for our proposed research study, and more importantly to provide further insight into the potential outcomes and limitations of what a study such as this could accomplish. To put things plainly, our proposed design would provide researchers with insights into how young white men who are predisposed to authoritarian attitudes will be more inclined to exhibit explicit racial prejudice as a result of the moderating effect of an exposure to extremist online content.

Over the course of this review, we have highlighted the theoretical tenets of authoritarianism as expressed by Adorno et al. (1950), and have demonstrated how authoritarianism can be reliably measured from the scales associated with RWA and SDO (Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994).

We have explored the evolution of racist attitudes in America in recent decades, and have identified how these attitudes are connected to Kimmel's conception of aggrieved entitlement among white men as a result of the perceived decrease in societal status anchored in part by racial resentment and isolation (Tesler, 2013; Kimmel, 2013; Kircht & Dillehay, 1967). We have highlighted how the rise of web 2.0 and the spread of misinformation and extremist conspiracy theories grew in tandem with the racist rhetoric of the Trump administration, and how access to these mediums of information provided right-wing extremists with an avenue to pursue a self-perpetuating cycle of the spread of online hate (Barkun, 2017; Kerr & Wilson, 2021). Most importantly, we have highlighted how each of these factors are more prevalent for groups of young white men who have been exposed to aspects of socialization on various internet platforms from the beginning of their formative years of childhood (DeCook, 2018; Costello et al., 2020).

This perpetuating cycle of the spread on online extremist content bears a number of jarring consequences for young white men who are predisposed to authoritarian attitudes, marking the potential for prejudicial attitudes to flourish as a result of the social approval these individuals receive from peers included in their friendship networks for spreading these messages (Jost et al., 2018; DeCook, 2018). The most concerning of all of these outcomes can be highlighted by the surge in violent acts of right-wing extremism that have occurred in America in recent years (ADL, 2020; Gray, 2017). By better understanding the additive effects of online extremism and exposure to this content for young white males who boast pre-existing authoritarian attitudes, researchers will be better equipped to understand the motivating factors that elicit explicitly racist attitudes in

the contemporary context. These questions bear particular importance in the broader scope of identifying preventative measures that can be taken to address the spread of misinformation and online hate, and more importantly, on the front of national security to ensure these violent acts can be prevented (ADL, 2020).

Where this study may falter can be traced to the persistent issue of social desirability measures when attempting to assess explicitly racist attitudes among a potential group of respondents (Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001). Some individuals have the capacity to detect questions included in batteries of explicit racial prejudice and understand that responding “yes” to questions that are in accordance with racial stereotyping do not align with the prevailing societal norms that do not condone racism or racial stereotypes (Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001). As a result, identifying the full extent of explicitly racist attitudes in a given sample is unlikely in the best possible case. For these reasons, this proposed study will lack a degree of external validity. Another potential drawback from completing a study of this calibre deals primarily with the question of the *consumption* of extreme political content versus a *willingness* to spread this type of information based on the volition of an individual. Our proposed study only addresses the aspect of consuming these forms of media, and their corresponding impacts on the explicitly racist attitudes of authoritarian adolescents. The motivational aspects of a willingness to admit to posting extreme online political content may suffer from the same form of external validity as the support for explicit racist attitudes on the basis of social desirability.

With these drawbacks aside, this paper attempts to lay a foundation for future researchers to explore the potential linkages between young white male adolescents who are predisposed to authoritarianism, their willingness to express explicitly racist attitudes, and whether or not exposure to online extremist content can enhance these attitudes. Future findings can provide

support for the connections established between the literature that relates to authoritarian attitudes (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981; Pratto et al., 1994), racial prejudice in America (Tesler, 2013; Huddy & Feldman, 2009) , and the increasing prevalence of online extremist content that enhances these attitudes in the contemporary context (Barkun, 2017; DeCook, 2018).

Though authoritarian attitudes and racial prejudice have become a dominant theme in the broader scope of American politics in recent years (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Tesler, 2009), it is equally as important to highlight the capacities and abilities of groups in recent years who have promoted the importance of democracy and democratization, and of redressing the institutional issues that coincide with American racism (Clare, 2016, 123). In the post-Trump era, political elites could follow the sage advice provided by Hetherington and Weiler in *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*, where the authors describe the importance of changing political discourse in a way that does not disparage outgroups, and seeks to redress issues related to discrimination against ethnic minorities on both sides of the aisle (2009, 85). In other ways, it is equally as important to maintain the institutional memory of systemic racism to ensure that these actions are not perpetuated, nor repeated. In the words of Elie Wiesel “...in the end, it is all about memory, its sources and its magnitude, and, of course, its consequences” (1958, 9).

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